

## **crooked letter 26**

### **Curmudgeonly Crank: A piece of my mind in two parts**

#### **Part One: December 2006**

*Jimmy lusted in his heart. I bloodlust in mine.*

I woke up this morning on the wrong side of the bed. No, I was right side up this morning. It was when I went out into the world that I woke up on the wrong side. After cursing out two motorists this morning- once as a pedestrian and once as a bicyclist, I realized that I was more than a little angry and that it was not a good day for me to be in the thick of things.

Then I worried that maybe the newest anti-depressant added to the flotation device of various pills that attempt to keep me from sinking into the depths was causing problems. Irritability, hostility and impulsive feelings are just a few of the “contact your doctor as soon as possible” symptoms listed.

But then I remembered that I had a similar burst of irritation and hostility toward the rest of humanity when I first started the other anti-depressant that I currently take.

And today was the sort of day that would try even the most sanguine of temperaments. And I, despite a cheerful demeanor, am not sanguine. What happened?

Well, I almost got hit, not once but twice.

I turned in the tag for my car, a car which I donated to the Dignity Project today, to find out that I don't get a refund for the 9 months I won't be using the tag, instead I have the option, if I get another car before my birthday next September, to reinstate the tag for only \$18.

At one of my various day jobs today, I had to deal with a group of students who were not paying attention. This is a semi-big deal because these students were about to put a speculum into my body.

This evening, I couldn't catch the bus I wanted because the bike racks were full. And later, I got a flat tire and so had to call my father to come pick me up.

On the drive home, Daddy informed me that Momma's stepmother Von died today. Momma's Daddy died a week before Thanksgiving. Momma, due to her own mental illness, cannot sit with sorrow and so lately has reverted to old emotionally abusive patterns that bring up memories of my shitty childhood. I do not look forward to what this new death will cause Momma to do. I want to offer her comfort as best I

can, but it is hard when she gets mean.

Today, I loudly cursed two people. When the teller at my credit union told me something I didn't want to hear involving a policy that I think is complete bullshit, I didn't hide my anger. My voice shook with unshed tears as I said, "That sucks."

I most often keep my anger in check, this hellish day being one of the exceptions. But it would be a lie to say that I don't and haven't felt extreme anger over and over and over again; I just don't act (directly) on it.

*I bloodlust in my heart.*

Years ago, when I lived and worked in San Francisco, I had to take the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) at rush hour. Twice a day, on the way back and forth from temp jobs I hated, I rode squooshed up against my fellow commuters in metal holding pens hurtling through a tunnel underground.

I hate being squooshed; I really hate being squooshed when I cannot see the sky. I'd rather be on a packed bus than a packed subway, even if it takes almost twice as long, because at least I can see the world is bigger than all the hackle rising flesh surrounding me. On these hellish for me commutes, I regularly fantasized about punching people in the middle of their backs- as hard as I could, anything to hurt them for making me claustrophobic.

I never punched anyone, well not as an adult, but I wanted to. I don't go to protest marches any more, because much of the time I end up wanting to body check the folks I'm marching with. It isn't kosher to spend most of a march for peace wanting to hurt people. The only way I like crowds is when I'm in front of them. I love people in the abstract, enjoy and am amused by them individually when up close and personal and hate them en masse. My father says that stupidity increases exponentially based on the number of people. I am more forgiving of the unwashed and washed masses than my father. Often, the washed masses are the worst. I must admit, I harbor no small amount of disdain for others. And sometimes, it would be nice just to slap the shit out of people.

*Jimmy lusted in his heart. I bloodlust in mine.*

When I am mentally healthy, I am less hesitant about expressing my impatience and anger in a semi-reasonable way, because I am more willing to deal with the negative consequences of letting people know that I find them irritating. When I am well, I am able to judge a bit more accurately when and how anger should be expressed and when and how it shouldn't. I am less afraid of my anger because I can make sounder judgements. The problem, of course, is that right now I am not mentally healthy.

When I am depressed, I play the martyr who sucks it all up and sits there suffering. I let my annoyance out in slow, passive aggressive slimy drips or swallow it whole where it tears up my insides or melodramatically explode with tears at just the wrong time. And rarely, though very common in my youth, I will scream and scream and scream. Lately, I've found myself screaming more often than I'd druther. Luckily, this has been confined to when I am driving.

### *Bloodlust of me and mine*

My family, on both sides, is a people of extravagant moods. We all are passionate, intense, easily riled, loving & sadistic, kind & mean as fuck. We are, with some justification, angry people. As I told my therapist, my people are extremely intelligent, creative beings who have been held back for generations by poverty and pain.

If there weren't an obviously strong genetic component, I still would be doomed by environment. I watch my parents and see how they burst over small things. My father is more successful than my mother, who has almost no impulse control. Momma is not a good example, because she does not, is not able, to grit her teeth and bear it; she bares her anger.

Daddy passes as calm. Those who do not know him well think he is mellow, friendly, jovial. Daddy is not mellow. He enjoys many things and likes being friendly, but he also is a cantankerous old fart. He passes for calm but then something will fall or break or get messed up. Pushed to the brink by all the small frustrations that he swallows, all the anger he denies, Daddy hurls offending objects or smashes them or clenches his hands into ferocious claws frozen just before committing much desired destruction. Daddy screams, roars with fury. If my father were pagan, his spirit animal would be the mother bear (not the father, the mother): protective, caring and wrathful when provoked.

I wressle with the idea that I am doomed to repeat my forebearers mistakes- even with the double knock-out of genetics and environment that predispose me to be someone who gets pissed off easily. Getting pissed is not inherently bad.

### *Not all bloodlust is bad.*

When I am well, even at my best, I am impatient, bossy and just a wee bit bitchy. In my family, curmudgeonly behavior earned praise and admiration. My father encouraged us to be cranks. He cultivated a bitchy sense of superiority in both my sister and me. There are drawbacks to this, but there also are advantages, especially for women in a sexist society. I take advantage of this when I am well.

My sister, who productively channels her share of our genetic inheritance of mood disorders by working too much, can, if she feels she has been wronged, tear someone a new asshole with her tongue. Representing herself, she won a case against a car dealership based on the lemon law. Do you know how next to

impossible that is? She is tenacious. She uses her anger to good effect.

As much as I like analingus, I have read too many Buddhist books to create an asshole with my tongue. Well, I have made an asshole of myself with my tongue a time or two, but that is a different story. I worry too much about my impact on others. I want to be honest *and* kind. I don't want to deny my anger. Anger often is a valid and useful response. I do want to be thoughtful about how I act or do not act on that anger. I do not want to be driven by it.

When I am well, I can use my anger. I can hold it. I can decide when to use it. When I am unwell, as I am now, my anger cuts me to shreds. My defenses against "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" are pathetic. My defenses against the reprecussions from expressing my anger, even when I manage to do this with some small grace, are non-existent.

The price for imperfectly expressing this emotion is high. None of us ever will express it perfectly because it has a ragged edge that catches and tears even when handled deftly. Despite this, I believe our society needs curmudgeonly cranks and critics. We need thoughtful, angry people to speak to us, to call us out, to challenge our complacencies. We need brave people to as skillfully and compassionately as they can cut us with that rough edged razor.

## **Part Two: February 2006**

*Not all bloodlust is good.*

My irritability and crankiness have not gone away. The subtraction of the anti-depressants, turns out they were making my depression worse, and the addition of a mood stabilizer and an anti-anxiety agent have not yet panned out a happy go lucky kind of girl.

I have plenty of happy moments for which I am grateful, but I am seized by the most intense, irrational bursts of anger. Yes, people are annoying or downright unsafe, but the intensity of my anger is frightening. I drop a glass full of water and stop myself just short of a rampage of destruction. Since one thing broke, I might as well destroy it all, my anger seems to say.

Perhaps, I'm channeling the writer Anne Lamott, whose beautiful, raw descriptions of despair and anger speak volumes, perhaps a Britannica's worth, to me. If I offered to share my razor dripping in cane syrup (anger, sweet honey on the razor's edge- Buddhist tract) I'm sure that Lamott would pull out her razor covered in chocolate fondue; we'd race to see who could lick up the most sticky sweetness with the least number of cuts or more perversly, compete to see who not only gets the most sugar but also the most pain. We'd cut our tongues; we cut our tongues, on a field day of anger.

I know why this is happening; I am in an unbeautiful condition called mixed

states- where hypomania does a frenetic Charleston with depression at a pace that would tire a sprinter in peak condition. I am not in peak condition. This, if the change in meds works and I take care of my health using “early to bed, early to rise, plenty of exercise” stratagems, eventually will stop.

It is slowly, oh so slowly, leveling. My moods are not swinging quite as wildly; I no longer have ten or so weeping fits a day. I do not have as many moments in which I want to maim others. Despite being in the midst of a prolonged and painful conflict in which no one is completely in the right or wrong, including myself, I only occasionally have thought about making voodoo dolls and putting the asses of these effies into a pretty construction paper fire. Oh, and I guess I have thought a couple of times that it might be fun to cackle with glee as I warm my hands over the smoldering embers of this worthy but woefully mismanaged project. That is not a charitable thought, but it is an entertaining one, though the better part of me (better in both size and morals) has no wish to see this happen.

*Bloodlust is bad.*

I fill with fury over something small, over something large that I have some right to be mad about. But regardless of the cause, my response is way out of proportion. My fury would not lead to an adroit handling of a critical edge. There are no precision cuts in this mode, no artfully butchered hanks of flesh. Instead, if I were to lift the knife, I would gash and gouge, puncture and tear, slash and hack. Without inflicting any physical damage, I could cause grievous harm.

I rightly resist this urge, but it does not go away. I turn my sharps on myself, because at least, I am not hurting anyone else. I make a misjudgment, a small mistake; the kind of mistake that might make others cringe for half a second on their own behalf but then drop it off the top of old worry and let it roll off the table and onto the floor and on out the door.

I cannot drop it. My brain subjects me to florid images of self-inflicted violence. Most folks think I'm joking when I mention wanting to poke knitting needles into my eyeballs, but honestly, that very graphic, violent, melodramatic, painful image regularly takes over my poor little mind.

This is excruciating. I do not have words, even now when not in the midst of a painful passion, to explain how much this self-reflected and inflicted rage damages me. This kind of unproductive, overwhelming anger is sweet cane syrup on a rusted razor's edge. The spoonful of sugar makes very bad medicine go down.

*Bloodlust is bad.*

Anger has its uses, but it hurts when it cuts.

